

**VDH COVID Partner Call Notes**  
**Friday, June 4, 2021**

- **Introduction, Suzi Silverstein, VDH Office of Emergency Preparedness:**

- We have administered over 8 million doses of vaccine in the Commonwealth so far. We currently have 55.2% of the population that has received at least one dose.
- If you look at the number of adults, that's 67.4% of the adults in Virginia that have received at least one dose.
- We are working towards our goal of 70% of adults having one dose by 4th July which is a goal set by the president. It looks like we are going to hit that target. If you look at number of people fully vaccinated that's 44.9% of the population and 56.4% of the adults.
- <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-in-virginia/>

- **Vaccination Update, Suzi Silverstein, VDH Office of Emergency Preparedness:**

- We are transitioning from more of a multi-agency unified command to a COVID task force as the volume of work has settling down a little bit. And we hope to make this transition by the end of June. Following up on the announcement that was made last Friday, May 28th all of the state mandated social distancing and capacity restrictions have been lifted. We are now only executive order 79.
- The only state mask mandate is for K through 12 settings and that's due to the low rates of vaccination in children. Right now only 12 years and older are eligible for the vaccine. The federal government still has a few mandates. Public transportation including buses trains and planes and health care settings.
- One of the big things that's going on in Virginia right now is the closing of or most of our mass vaccination sites and we are shifting our efforts towards mobile vaccination units and sending vaccines to local pharmacies and doctor's offices.
- One of the issues with that previously is we get such loads of volumes of vaccine in, they couldn't use that much. So we have a plan now that we're implementing to redistribute these larger volumes of vaccine that we are receiving to the state and redistribute them in smaller amounts to private practices and small pharmacies.
- So we're working with them and encouraging more of these smaller facilities to get vaccine and administer vaccine. And that seems to be working well because these places are a lot closer and easier for the population of Virginia to access a lot of them.
- Another big push in the last few weeks is vaccinating the 12 to 15-year-olds that previously were not eligible.
- We are at about 20% of the eligible 12 to 15-year-olds that have gotten vaccine already and we are working closely with the Department of Ed and school districts to develop plans to vaccinate those adolescents in their jurisdictions.
- So some of them are doing it in the schools. Some of them are using schools afterhours. Some of them have plans with local pharmacies. Everyone seems to have their own plan with what works best for them but it is good to see there are plans and things are happening across the state.
- One thing that's happening nationally a lot of people are missing their second dose shots. What we are doing in Virginia is we are encouraging everyone if you haven't gotten your second dose shot to call the call center, 877-VAX IN VA phone number to schedule your

second shot or you can go online and schedule an appointment with multiple different providers that have it.

- And we've also made an effort to reach out to some of these people and have a call center call them to help schedule their second appointment and that has been pretty successful.
- Another thing with the call center that has been successful we are using, it is called artificial intelligence or you might hear it referred to as a bot or a virtual assistant.
- When you log on to the VDDH Web page you will see hi I'm the Virginia virtual assistant and you can type in and ask questions and it pulls the answers from the FAQ documents to answer questions for people.
- The data is showing us that 80% successful which is to me was pretty surprising and we're pleased to see such a high success rate. Callers are people that have logged on that cannot get hair question answered are referred to the call center to get their questions answered. Most of the questions are coming in during the daytime hours.
- Another big focus for us is since we don't have these large sites anymore, is reaching out to the population that isn't connected electronically all the time and did have the ability to go on and find a place to go online find a place to get an appointment or to schedule in the preregistration systems.
- We're doing a lot of work with community health folks, community outreach workers, each of the districts is hiring some and we are getting a grant that's going to start in July to help fund some of those positions. So we're working on that as well.
- The last thing I will mention because we get asked about this quite a bit, is if we have extra vaccine why we can't send it overseas. We are not able to do that with the vaccine that we are getting at the state. But yesterday the White House released a plan to share 25 million doses of the COVID vaccine with other countries.

- **Hurricane Preparedness in the COVID Environment, Michelle Oblinsky, Bureau Chief, Virginia Emergency Support Team (VEST), Virginia Department of Emergency Management:**

- My bureau in VDM is responsible for policies and procedures that govern the VES and ensure readiness of the state emergency operations center. The VES overall is comprised of -- more than 300 trained and ready teammates from 100 state agencies volunteer agencies private sector, and we all come together to support localities and state agencies in the response and recovery from disasters.
- All VDEM employees have a role on the VEST and form a core VEST position. So as Suzi said we are transitioning from a unified command operation with VDEM and VDH in the lead for COVID vaccine response and VDM is moving to a support role to VDH. We we'll continue to have personnel in key roles in finance operations, logistics and planning. VDM's role in the Commonwealth is to coordinate emergency response and recovery efforts.
- The downsizing of VDEM efforts with COVID allows the agency to turn our focus on hurricane. The height is September through October, about the middle of September to the middle of October. And although we can experience storms at any time, our focus is typically on hurricane effort is typically from August to October.
- Our efforts over this past month and in to the rest of June and July will allow us to focus on getting ready for that height of hurricane season in Virginia. One way that we're doing that is our outreach efforts. We will be having stakeholder meeting and several of those

are scheduled for mid-month. We meet with localities and other agencies. We meet with the legislative contacts to provide information on hurricane preparedness as well as information on hurricane season overall in our planning efforts.

- We've had many of lessons learned since February of last year as many of you on the call have as well related COVID and we have updated our standard operating guidelines to reflect these lessons learned. Another thing that we're doing and continue to work on is specific VES training for hurricanes and we are bringing in some exercise specific trainings in July and August as preparation for hurricane season.
- We've also done a number of audiovisual upgrades in the emergency operation center to facilitate hybrid in person and virtual meetings and this will allow us to have direct connection to agency coordination centers for hurricanes and to allow us to keep numbers down in emergency operation center by allowing folks to continue to support the VES virtually. We are also doing some EOC space allocation updates.
- We've realized a need for more flexible work space. And we now have the ability to do somewhat distributed operations and that allows us to free up some of the larger spaces in the EOC to be multi use spaces. So again we've updated our standard operating guidelines. We've done some space reallocation, we are updating processes and procedures. Bringing in additional VES training. Job aids. And the like.
- We will be continue that work over the next two months to make sure that the Commonwealth is prepared for hurricane season.

- **Shelter Planning, Linda Botts, Virginia Department of Social Services:**

- I'm the state shelter coordinator with the Virginia Department of Social Services. I wanted to talk about. So planning and work that we are doing on May 24th the health Commissioner released his updated interim guidance for disaster shelters. That guidance really follows the guidance that was released last year in terms of COVID protections, wearing masks, social distancing, enhanced cleaning, and all those different protocols that have been in place for the last year will continue to be in place for disaster sheltering.
- On the state level we do have plans for non-congregate sheltering. That's still the preferred method under this new updated guidance. And we continue to refine plans for that. However we know this we are not going to be able to meet the full need if we have to open state shelter, we will probably not meet the full need residents and evacuees. We do planning for congregate sheltering as a backup. Now that the health orders have been lifted, people are traveling now and we expect hotel rooms that are sitting vacant last year will probably not be vacant this year. We are planning for both types of operations. We have equipment and supplies set aside for, you know, the protection of our staff and our volunteers. And enhanced cleaning protocols as well.
- We also are working with state agency partners to update our commodity list. That work has been ongoing and will probably continue throughout much of the summer as we're updating, you know, needs and quantities and so forth for that. We'll be doing a virtual rostering exercise with our state agency partners in early August to get a snapshot of what rostering will look like with COVID still in play, understanding that we are trying to corner but that's still going to affect potentially how many staff were able to pull in to state shelter operations.
- So there is a lot of different processes and work that's being done at this point in time to prepare for hurricane season.

- I know that there is a lot of local shelter planning that is going on. We have been holding workshops across the Commonwealth and we have three for workshops that will be taking place in June within each of the VDEM regions where we will be talking to local shelter planning partners, kind of get a better understanding of their planning needs and kind of where they are at. Those have been really, really helpful and really informative. If you are involved in local sheltering, and, you know, the local shelter planning I hope that you will be able to participate in those workshops if you are able to do so. And we understand that the needs vary widely across the Commonwealth.
- So just in differences with the availability of hotel rooms, some places don't necessarily even have a lot of hotels. So, you know, non-congregate operations may be much more difficult in some areas of the Commonwealth than in other areas. So there is a lot going on. Hopefully we have some conversation right before opening up this call that hopefully there won't be a hurricane affecting Virginia this year.
- We hope that every year, of course. But we are taking all the necessary steps to be prepared should that happen and reaching out to local and regional partners to gage their preparedness efforts as well.

- **Hurricane Planning, Adrian Green, American Red Cross:**

- Good morning, everyone. Just begin with a little bit of who I am and why I'm on the call. We also have Victoria Cling who is on the call as a participant. Victoria is the regional disaster officer and I am the state relations director. Basically Victoria and her team, Tome Barry, she and her teamwork together at the regional level. So they are responsible for everything that's going on in Virginia region. And my role with Maryland Delaware District of Columbia, Virginia and FEMA region 3 is to be a support, to help them with guidance, with any relationships, discussions and all that sort of thing.
- Day-to-day stuff keep working through your regional teams but just know that you have people like myself in the division and all the way up to the headquarters who can help support with any other questions or additional -- presentations.
- We are always happy to be a part of it. So what are we looking at for this COVID season? Well, the one thing that we are a -- when it comes to shelters in particular is transitioning back to congregate sheltering as our primary and in most cases and this is for larger disaster responses. We are not talking about single family fires or small apartment fires. Those folks will still be lodged as we can obviously in hotels.
- But we're looking at the larger situations if we to have the hurricane hitting the coast. And why are we are transitioning back to congregate sheltering? There is a couple of reasons. Linda touched on the non-congregate sheltering. Some areas there are no hotels. That all of you know only two well.
- We do need to make sure that we have shelters that are accessible to people without -- without too much travel obviously. There is going to be travel for folks to get there. But, you know, we don't want folks having to do an excessive travel distance to get to NCS, non- congregate sheltering. And we found that in a couple of other larger operations that especially with the lack of hotel space now, because folks are traveling more, folks are going on vacations, starting -- things are starting to open up again. So people really are filling up that hotel space very quickly.
- Even if we get some additional rooms in the hotel, it's not like it was a year ago when the hotels were in fact, some were closing. We didn't have the occupancy to justify even

staying open. So some were closing. Others were struggling to maintain a decent occupancy, to get the staff and keep the staff working.

- So when we came along and wanted 100 hotel rooms that was great for the hotels. And they were very willing to work with us and support us. But now that their occupancy rate has gone up dramatically it sort of switches the other way and becomes a challenge for us. And also just the general cost is significantly higher at that point.
- Your typical supply and demand. So not just that we are not using NCS and will never use it. That's not correct. We are still very much, you know, looking at both options. But the preference beginning really now is moving back towards congregate sheltering. You know, some challenges with that still obviously be -- there is some reluctance in the schools, even though it is summer, to have folks come in there.
- We need to look at what do we do in the fall for space, et cetera. No different than any other hurricane season. But if schools are back in session, then, you know, what are alternatives lodging spaces for that. We, of course, want to work with the Department of Health and their partners in VDEM and VDSS that we work with on a regular basis. Just to make sure that we are follow all the CDC guidance. We've talked a lot to our workforce about use of PPE and social distancing. And washing hands frequently. But all of that that we put in place internally getting following CDC guidance meant that we actually were very successful in an extremely low COVID rate within our workforce because of the protocols and just the reinforcement within all of the regions and all the disaster relief operations about the importance of the PPE and social distancing, et cetera.
- I actually just finished running the disaster relief operation call site in Kentucky and we had 0 cases within our workforce of COVID. We had, you know, nobody hospitalized, nobody sick. It has been very successful. We are going to continue to follow that guidance and request their workforce and the residents to wear PPE, socially distance and obviously make sure that there is plenty of hand washing stations and sanitizer and everything else available.
- The things like the feeding again, transition to that eventually. Right now we are still doing the sort of box meals and that sort of thing just to make it easier for folks and obviously from health perspective, I'm not sure if or when we will transition back to serving more sort of cafeteria style again. But right now at this particular point where we are not.
- The other services, the wrap-around services that we have, you know, they will continue whether it's non congregate or congregate. Mental health supports, virtual care, our case work, financial assistance to clients, all of that type of thing continues. So really it is primarily the sheltering component, transitioning. Mostly from NCS over to the congregate shelter site again for us.
- Linda had mentioned about the August workshops. Please invite us. We really are wanting to participate inasmuch of that as possible. And look forward to it. And to continue to work with you all.

- **Question and Answer Session:**

- **QUESTION:** Joe Carter, City of Falls Church, Can you give me a date, I know you said that the mass vaccination sites will be closing. Do you have specific ones and the dates that you are looking at?

- **RESPONSE:** Suzi Silverstein, Some of them have already closed. Some of them are going to remain open as long as there is a need. But Michelle, I think all of the large CDCs have closed, haven't they?
- **ADDITIONAL RESPONSE,** Michelle Oblinsky, There is still I believe the Prince William and the Fairfax are still open. And I believe one in Hampton Roads. Sorry I don't have those committed to memory. But all of those sites will be closed by the end of the month.
- **Closing, Suzi Silverstein, VDH Office of Emergency Preparedness:**
  - I want to thank everybody for your participation. Special thanks to our speakers for the great presentation and very helpful information.
  - Our next call is June 25, so we are not having a call for the next two weeks. I already have one speaker lined up on the K through 12 school reopening and their testing strategy. If there is any other topics you would like to hear, please be sure to send me an e-mail so I can line up the speakers.